

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 182 237

SO 012 337

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 TITLE Armenian Khatchkar (Stone Cross) Carved in 1308.
 INSTITUTION Armenian Relief Society, Inc., Boston, Mass.
 SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
 PUB DATE 76
 NOTE 13p.; For related documents, see SO 012 334-340
 AVAILABLE FROM Armenian Relief Society, Inc., 212 Stuart Street,
 Boston, MA 02116 (\$1.00)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Ancient History; *Art Education; Class Activities;
 *Cultural Awareness; Elementary Secondary Education;
 *Ethnic Studies; History Instruction; Instructional
 Materials; *Sculpture; Social Studies; Student
 Projects; Visual Arts

IDENTIFIERS *Armenians; Ethnic Heritage Studies Program Act

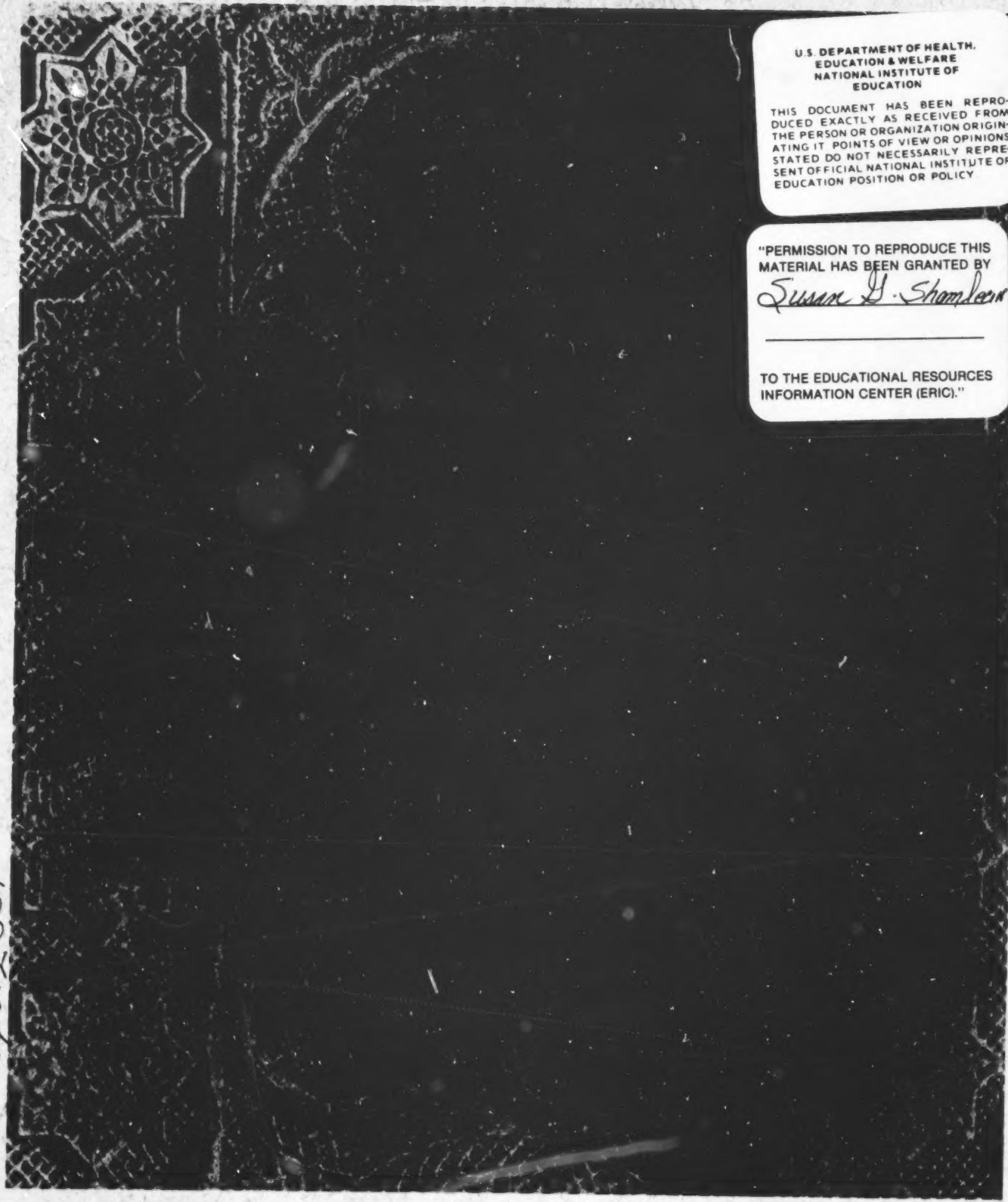
ABSTRACT

This booklet introduces students to a unique form of stone sculpture made by Armenian artists for over twelve centuries, the khatchkar, or stone cross. The document is part of a series of seven instructional materials dealing with the history and culture of Armenian Americans. It contains a reading on khatchkars as symbols of faith for eternity, a map of khatchkar sites in Soviet Armenia, worksheets on khatchkar features, and instructions for making a plaster khatchkar. For the worksheet activity, students identify types of decoration from a photograph of an 11th century sculpture. Both the reading and the instructions for the plaster khatchkar are accompanied by several photographs and drawings. The booklet may be used independently of the other materials in the series. (KC)

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ARMENIAN KHATCHKAR (STONE CROSS) CARVED IN 1308

KHATCHKARS

Armenian Cross Stones

MOSSIK HACOBIAN — A.R.S. Armenian Ethnic Heritage Project

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To Parents and Teachers

Stone is one of the constant elements in Armenia's long history. Perched on a nest of mountains peaked by Biblical Mt. Ararat, Armenia has had a tradition of working with and carving stone going back thousands of years. To learn about the Armenian people's use of stone during different periods of their history is to understand an important aspect of the Armenian spirit. It is the purpose of this booklet to introduce your child or student to a unique form of stone sculpture that preoccupied Armenian artists, sculptors, architects and stone masons for over twelve centuries.

To experience on a small scale the task of the sculptor and to appreciate the effort and care that went into the carving of each of the thousands of khatchkars now found in every corner of Armenia, the student is asked to cast and carve a small plaster khatchkar of his own. The reading, worksheets, and step by step instructions on the following pages will prepare your "young sculptor" for the task. The completed plaster khatchkar will make a handsome addition to any display at home or in school.

SYMBOLS OF FAITH FOR ETERNITY

Khatchkar means *stone cross*, or more literally, *cross-carrying stone*. Khatchkars are a unique religious and artistic expression of the Armenian people and were produced in large numbers, with few interruptions, from the 5th to the 17th centuries.

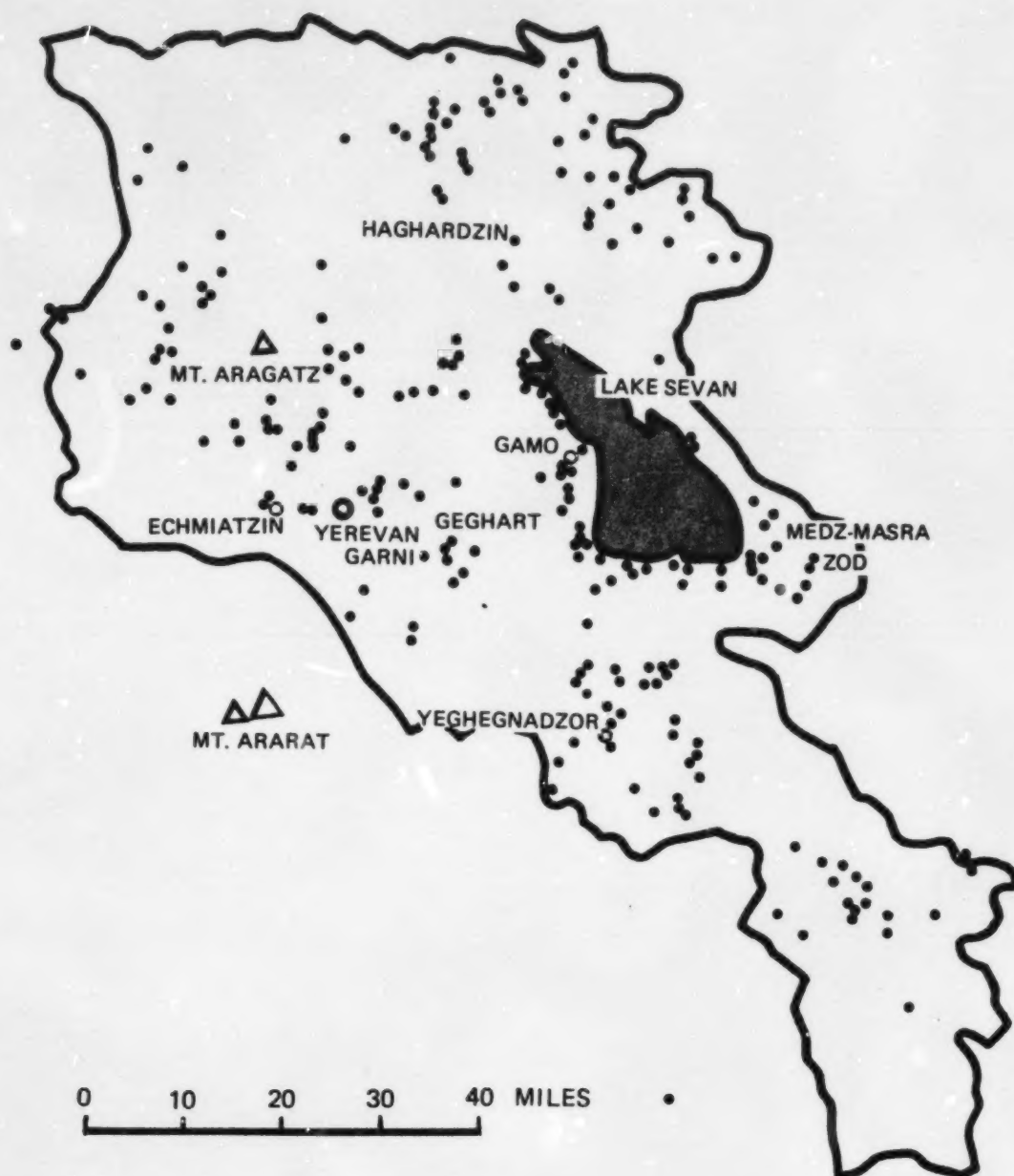
Large stones have always inspired awe in human beings. Their hardness and permanence make them symbols of time, both ancient and future. Compared to the short span of human life, large stones represent eternity. In ancient times some of the first monuments or images, toward which people directed their religious worship, were trees and monolithic stones. This practice developed independently in many parts of the world. In Armenia the erosion of stone and natural lava rock formations probably were the first such images worshipped, and served as altars.

Certain stones were thought to have special powers over animals, people, and forces of nature. Gravestones were thought of as shelters where the spirits of the dead would be protected. Other stones were thought to insure fertility of the fields and the birth of healthy babies to women in their childbearing years.

During the period of the earliest kingdom in Armenia, the Urartu, large stone tablets in the shape of rectangles with rounded tops, and carrying cuniform inscriptions (photo 1), were set on stone bases much like later khatchkars. Similarly, in the 2nd century B.C., Armenian king, Ardashes I, erected boundary stones with inscriptions in the ancient Aramaic language (photo 2), the same language used in writing parts of the original Bible.



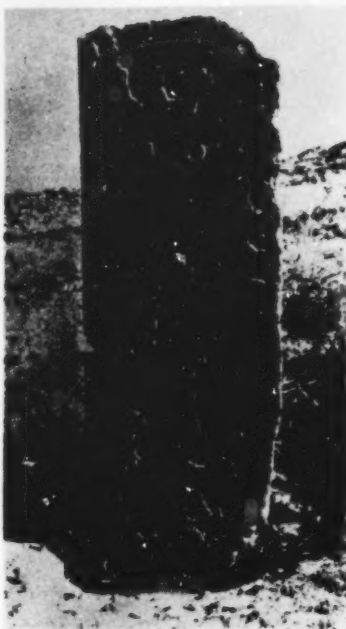
1 — DIARY OF ROOSA II — Dated at 685-675 B.C., this cuniform tablet describes the many construction projects initiated by the Urartian king in order to develop the Herazdan valley area. Mention is made of planting vineyards and other fruit trees, diverting water from a river through a canal and offering of sacrifices to the pagan gods. The 47-line inscription concludes with traditional curses aimed at those who would deface or destroy the monument.



KHATCHKAR SITES IN SOVIET ARMENIA



2 — *Boundary stone of Ardashes I (2nd century B.C.)*



3 — *Earliest dated khatchkar at Garni (879 A.D.)*



4 — *Khatchkar from the village Kamo (1521 A.D.)*

After their conversion to Christianity around 300 A.D., Armenians applied their 1000-year-old tradition of carving stone blocks to the symbols of their new religion. The first khatchkars were in wood. St. Gregory the Illuminator, founder of the Armenian church, is said to have ordered the installation of khatchkars at important crossroads and town squares. From the 5th century on, however, the image of the cross carved in stone instead of wood became one of the main preoccupations of Armenian artists and sculptors. Khatchkars were erected as gravestones, road markers, offerings for fulfillment of prayers, and in appreciation for safe return from battle. They were also installed at church entrances to symbolize passage into a holy place (photo 5). By the 17th century, Armenians had carved thousands upon thousands of these unique stone symbols.

Khatchkars are usually placed facing east. Inscriptions about the donors, the artists, dates and motives for their creation, were often carved below on the base, or on the edge of the khatchkar itself.



5 — *Khatchkar at the entrance of the Haghardzin church (13th century)*

One of the oldest khatchkars, found in a cemetery in Garni, was commissioned by Queen Catranide, wife of King Ashot I Bagratouni, in 879 A.D. Erected as a sign of the queen's faith, it is a simple cross that stands 6 feet tall (photo 3).

In later Khatchkars, the cross is surrounded by decorative carvings of birds, animals, fish, human figures, smaller crosses, flowers, palm leaves, and more often grapes and pomegranates. The designs became so intricate that by the 13th century the carvings of many khatchkars looked like lacework. A good example of this is found in the church of Noravank in Yeghegnadzor, carved in 1308 by a master sculptor, painter and architect named Momik (cover photo).

Khatchkars are commonly found grouped together in cemeteries or churchyards. An unusual example of a khatchkar grouping is found at a monastery in Geghart where groups of freestanding khatchkars are combined with others carved in the native rock of a large cliff

the height of a five story building. These khatchkars were carved in the 13th and 14th centuries (photo 7).

An expert sculptor would spend months and often years working on a given khatchkar. The carving of each khatchkar was an act of faith for the sculptor in addition to being his daily work. It was recently estimated in Massachusetts that to have a khatchkar carved by a stone sculptor in the United States today would cost about \$8,000.

Wherever they stood, even along a deserted crossroad, khatchkars served as small altars for the faithful. Worshipers would light candles or offer sacrifices of chicken or lamb at the foot of the khatchkar. Even today, travelling through Armenia, you see many khatchkars with stains of animal blood and burning candles. Whenever they pass by a khatchkar, old-timers pause, make a sign of the crucifix, and offer prayers before this stone symbol that represents not only Christianity, but the mountainous homeland of the Armenians.



6 — Unique, 7½ foot tall, double-cross khatchkar carved in basalt and located in the village of Zod (1274 A.D.)



7 — Group of khatchkars at the Geghart Monastery (13-14th century)

WORKSHEET — FEATURES OF A TYPICAL KHATCHKAR

Identify three or four different types of decorations surrounding the central cross on this 11th century khatchkar from Yeghegnadzor, Armenia.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____



MAKE YOUR OWN KHATCHKAR

The tallest *stone crosses* or *khatchkars* of Armenia are about 8 feet high, close to the height of a room. Sculptors worked for years to carve lace-like designs out of volcanic rock. Follow the directions below and you can make a small *plaster khatchkar* of your own in a few short hours. Work individually or in groups of two.

Using a plaster block is the closest we can come to the stone of the original khatchkars. Carving plaster will be easier but similar to carving stone. An alternate material that is even easier to carve is styro-foam boards or sheets that are found in many packing cases of various breakable objects. If you choose to

use this material for your khatchkar, begin with step 3 of the instructions below.

You will need the following materials and tools:

- 1) Cardboard box top, rectangular disposable aluminum baking pan, or shoe box cover, and a 12 inch by 8 inch scrap piece of wood, or heavy cardboard.
- 2) Thumb tack or tape and carbon paper.
- 3) Package of plaster of Paris and a mixing can.
- 4) Carving tools if available; you can also use chisels, old screwdrivers, nails and a hammer.
- 5) Water colors in gray, pink, orange or brown.



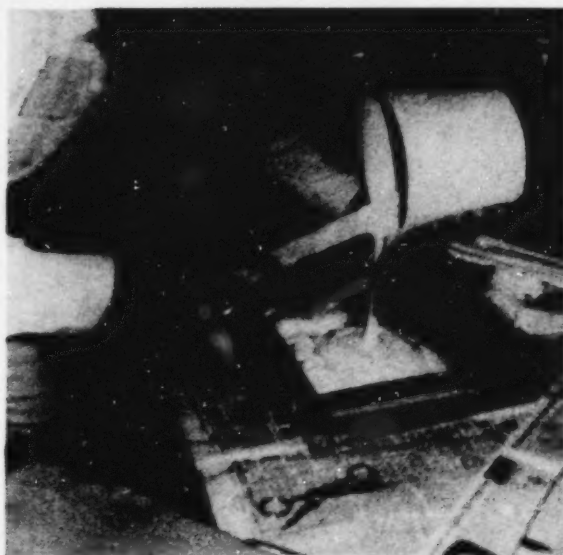
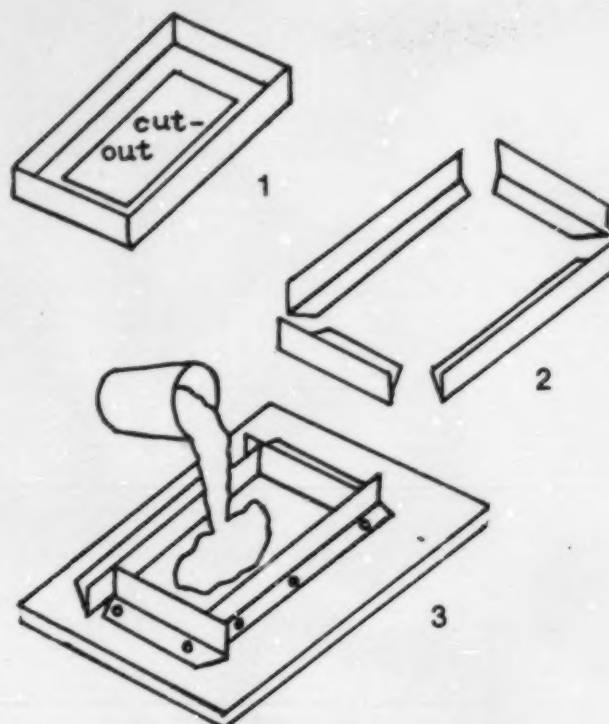
COLOR THIS SKETCH of a stone mason carving a khatchkar. This drawing is based on a painting in a 1725 Armenian religious calendar.

1. Plaster block

There are a number of ways to make a mold for your plaster block:

- a) You can use a cardboard boxtop;
- b) You can use a disposable aluminum baking pan (rectangular);
- c) **Make a mold:** Cut out the middle of a shoe box cover as illustrated (1). Cut at the corners to obtain four separate sides (2). Tack or tape down on a scrap piece of wood or a heavy cardboard (3).

Your mold should measure at least 6 inches by 4 inches and at most 12 inches by 8 inches. Most khatchkars have a height to width ratio of 3 to 2.



Pour and spread the plaster in your mold so that it fills every corner. When it dries, carve on the smooth underside of the block.

2. Plaster mix

First cover your work area with old newspapers to protect from plaster dust. Mix plaster of Paris and water until you have a thick but flowing mixture and pour into your

mold to a thickness of $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch. Place your mold in a safe place to dry and harden, which will take about 15 minutes. If you're out of time now, set the mold aside for another day.

3. Khatchkar design

Draw a design the same size as your khatchkar on a sheet of paper. You can use any of the khatchkars shown in this booklet as a model but feel free to experiment with your own ideas.

4. Design on plaster block

Transfer your design onto the hardened plaster, or styrofoam board.

5. Begin carving

Scrape and chip away areas around your design using available carving tools. When you chip away at the block with hammer and chisel, strike your hammer gently to avoid cracking the block — this is a problem for all sculptors. Use small nails or carving tools to do the details of your design. Take your time carving even if it takes more than one session. Remember the original khatchkars took *months* or even years.

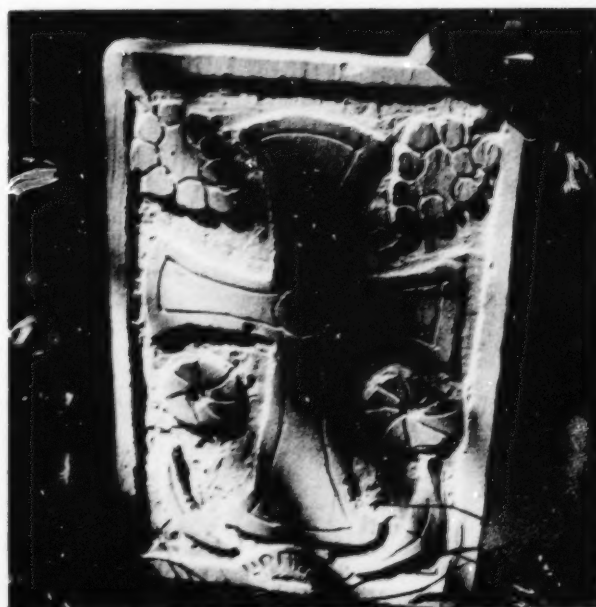
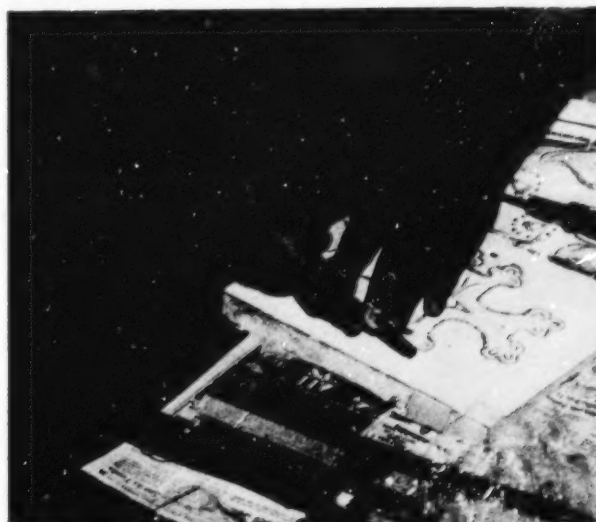
6. Paint

Khatchkars were carved out of basalt or toof (tufa) rocks which came in shades of gray, grayish pink, orange or brown. Use water colors and paint your khatchkar one of these shades. Your khatchkar is now ready for display in your classroom, school, church or home.

Plaster Khatchkar — *This is one example of a finished plaster khatchkar before painting.*

(Top photo) A khatchkar design is being drawn on the smooth surface of a plaster block.

(Middle photo) Carving out the design with a chisel.





Armenian Ethnic Heritage Project

Sponsored by the Armenian Relief Society — Funded by the United States Office of Education

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The staff of the Armenian Ethnic Heritage Project is grateful to the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), 392 Concord Avenue, Belmont, Massachusetts for allowing us unlimited access to its facility and extensive use of its rich collection of books and materials in the preparation of these publications.

Children and teachers in the schools listed below participated in the trial teaching of some or all of the lessons in this booklet. Their efforts, questions and suggestions are gratefully appreciated.

Franklin Public School, Lexington, Mass.	Sahag-Mesrob Armenian School, Watertown, Mass.
A.G.B.U. Day School, Watertown, Mass.	St. Gregory Armenian School, North Andover, Mass.
Nerses Shnorhali Armenian School, Fairfield, Conn.	St. Stephen's Armenian School, Watertown, Mass.
Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Church School, Providence, R.I.	St. Vartanantz Armenian School, Ridgefield, N.J.

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PHOTOS AND SKETCHES:

Sketch on page 7 — Joan Ohanian Hacobian from Plate XV, Fig. 22 in **Crafts and Mode of Life in Armenian Miniatures** by Astghik Guevorkian, Hayastan Publishing House, Yerevan 1973.

Cover and photos 4, 6, 7, and pages 6 and 11 — **Armenian Khatchkars**

Photos 1, 2, 3, 5 and map on page 3 — **Documents of Armenian Architecture No. 2 — Khatchkar**

Khatchkar construction photos on pages 8 and 9 — Bob Nakashian; from A.R.S. Armenian Ethnic Heritage Project teachers' workshop, Sept. 1975.